REFLECTIONS
ON A
DIALOGUE
BETWEEN A
Calviniſtical Preacher
AND A
THIEF:

Wherein is ſhewn the unreaſonableneſs of the *Calviniſtical Decrees.*

Lege, antequam judicas.

LONDON: Printed for *J. Wells*, near the Weſt-end of St. *Pauls*, and Sold by the Bookſellers of *London* and *Weſtminſter*, 1699.

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TO THE READER.

HAVING *read a Book, Entituled,* A Dialogue between a *Calviniſtical* Preacher and a Thief: *Who notwithſtanding the Evils which he had done, did yet think himſelf predeſtinated to Eternal Life.*

The unuſualneſs of the Subject inclin'd me to Tranſlate it, upon which I propos'd my intent to ſome of my Acquaintance; who, perſwaded me to do it; but finding the Book upon the account of its Impiety not fit to be tranſlated, without ſuch Reflections upon the

Discourse of the Thief and Preacher, as might be useful to hinder the further spreading of their wicked Opinions, instead therefore of a formal Translation which I once design'd, I shall do what I suppose will be more for your advantage, viz.

1. *I will Historically represent the Thiefs Arguments, and the Preachers Answers.*

2. *I will shew that the Preachers Answers are not sufficient to bring the Thief from the Impiety which he had lived in.*

3. *I will endeavour to give such an account of the Divine Decrees as may (through God's goodness) prevent others falling into the like horrid Opinions, and this I shall endeavour to do these two ways.* First,

First, *By proving that an absolute, immutable and unconditional Decree, is inconsistent with the Divine Goodness.*

2dly, *By shewing that such a Decree would destroy all true Piety.*

This Method I am inclin'd to take for these two Reasons.

First because the mischief of the Thiefs Notions might farther extend its self, if he was only made to speak English.

Secondly, because I have been inform'd that the Fur Prædestinatus *hath been already Translated, but whether it hath or no, this Method I hope will make the ensuing Discourse useful to you, for whose good I design'd it.*

To the Reader.

Tho' the Doctrine of an immutable, absolute and unconditional Decree, be indeed abominable; and tho' according to these Calvinistical Principles, a Man cannot be converted, because he may excuse the great Impiety of his Life, by the greater Impiety of his Faith; notwithstanding the Blasphemy of the Doctrine, there are many besides the Preacher and the Thief, who have adopted these Principles into their Religion and Creed. Therefore in order to prevent the farther spreading of them, I shall in transitu make some Reflections upon the Thiefs Arguments, and the Preachers Answers; least an uninterrupted Series of Blosphemy, might with an unwary Reader make these Doctrines pass for good Divinity. The

To the Reader.

The vileness of the Doctrine hath met with Men vile enough to defend it, and therefore I have endeavour'd to expose it, that we may not be forced to feel its evil Effects, which that we may not, is the prayer of him who is kind Reader,

Your Servant.

Reflections on a Dialogue *between a* Calviniſtical *Preacher and a Thief.*

A *Calviniſtical* Preacher hearing of a Thief condemn'd to dye for the Crimes he had Committed, who notwithſtanding the Impiouſneſs of his Life, and the Evils which he had done, was yet ſo confident as to think himſelf Predeſtinated to Eternal Life, comes to viſit him that he might know whether his hopes of his *Predeſtination* were well grounded, and that the Thief might not ruine himſelf in a

nother World, as he had already done in this; the Preacher enquires into the State and Condition of his Soul, which that he might know, he thus begins his Discourse,

A good Evening to you young Man, How do you live?

To which Question the Thief Answer'd, *That he had liv'd as it had pleased God, who works all Things according to the pleasure of his own Will, to determine concerning him, and in time to effect in him.*

The Preacher hearing this Answer of the Thief, told him *that he said true, and that he was much troubled to see him in Chains*; telling the Thief *that he ought much more to be troubled, for his sad State and Condition, for that now a detestable Death was soon to period and end all the Extravagancies, and Follies of his past Life.*

To which the Thief Replys, *that he knew not why the Preacher or himself should be troubled for his present Circumstances, because he did not know but that tho' he had not long to live in the World, yet that he might by an absolute immutable and unconditional Decree be Predestinated to the eternal happiness of the next.*

Here Reader you may find the Thief giving himself (notwithstanding his wicked Life) a very fair Character, and instead of deploring his sinful Life, and with sighs and tears begging the pardon of it, he speaks with no more concern either for his present or future Interest, than if he had been already possest of all those Glories to the enjoyment of which, he vainly supposed himself Predestinated.

Tho' this extravagant and impious Discourse of the Thief did justly deserve the Preachers reproof, yet he

doth

doth not blame the Thief either for the impiousness of his Life, or the no concern which he had for his Interest in another World, which ought now to have been provided for, because his abode was to be so short in this; yet here is no sense of Sorrow in the Thief, nor no Exhortations to Repentance from the Preacher, but as if he came rather to secure the Thief in his Sins than to bring him from them, the Preacher grants *that the Thief had lived according to God's Will*, which one *postulatum* granted was I think more powerful to keep the Thief in his Sins, than any thing that the Preacher could say to dissuade him from them.

For to live *according to God's Will* is certainly the best Life, not only in reference to the Piety but also to the Advantage of it, because *the Will of God* is the rule of all that is good; God being in his own Na-

ture

ture so perfectly Good that he neither doth nor can Will that which is Evil, and therefore the Thief did no less falsly than blasphemously Affirm *that he had liv'd according to God's will*: This impious assertion of the Thief *that he had lived according to God's will* would (if rightly consider'd) have been as Insignificant as it was Impious; is through the Preachers Impious Confession become unanswerable; for to grant that the Thief notwithstanding the Evils which he had done, *had lived according to God's will*, was but in effect to applaud him for his Villanies, to commend him for his Vices, and to encourage him to be damn'd: Whereas if he had told the Thief that that he did miserably deceive himself to think *that he lived according to God's will*, whilst he violated his Commandments, one of which was, *thou shalt not Steal*, and that to the breach of this Commandment

God

God had threatned the loſs of the Kingdom of Heaven, which he never doth to thoſe *who do his will*; no, they are always happy in his favour; which if he did expect to be, he muſt repent of his Sins, for that it was not only a falſe but alſo a dangerous ſuppoſition, *that he did God's will* whilſt he ſinned againſt him, for that it was impoſſible for him to do *God's will*, when he had in ſo many Inſtances violated his Laws; to the violation of which Laws, God had threatned and inflicted too ſo many puniſhments even in this Life, that he could not but admire that notwithſtanding the Principles he had imbibed, his Sins did not ſometimes ſit uneaſie on his Conſcience, ſince he always in his Memory carryed a witneſs againſt himſelf which could not but make him fear (inſpight of all his evil Principles) leaſt his Faith ſhould do him more hurt in another World, than his Life had done in this. Tho'

Tho' the Thief did believe *that he had lived according to God's will*, and the Preacher did grant *that he had*, yet to me it seems impossible that he should not know that in each violation of *God's Law*, he did live contrary to his *will*. Unless that at last he should not only loose his Conscience, but also his Sense and Reason too, and so at once become so extravagantly foolish and wicked, as to suppose God to be actually as well as permissively the Cause of Evil; falsely deeming the Almighty to be no less the Author of our Sins than Life: And that it was equally pleasing to him whether we lead innocent or vitious lives; thus as some Men take their Faith from their Sins, so these take their Sins from their Faith.

This belief makes the Thief speak as confidently of his State and Condition, as if he had not done amiss; And I am sure the Preacher's An-

swer

swer doth not tend to bring him from his Evil Sentiments, of the Divine Decrees; for the Preacher having once granted *that the Thief had lived according to God's Will*, did thereby make useless and render ineffectual all his after Exhortations.

For 'tis to no purpose to perswade that Man to live holily who is already assured *that he lives according to God's Will*; for if God doth Will only that which is Good, as both Reason and Religion do oblige us to believe, then to dissuade a Man from doing of *God's Will*, would be so far from being a duty, that it would be a Sin; and one might justly suppose all such diswasions to be the Teachings of a Fiend, and of one sent from the Regions of darkness in order to bring Men there, rather than of a Preacher of the Gospel sent to perswade Men from their Evil Ways. But on the other

side

side, if *God wills* that which is Evil, how can he be just in punishing us for the doing of that which himself hath oblig'd us to do? So that this concession was as dishonourable to God, as it was destructive to the Thief, and may more justly be thought a perverting of the Gospel, than it can be a Preaching of it.

Had the Thief indeed *lived according to God's Command*, the Preachers pity would have been as useless as his Arguments; and neither the Thiefs being in Chains or shortly to dye ought to have been a trouble either to the Thief, or Preacher, or any other Spectator of his Death; for that *if he had dyed according to God's Will*, he must have been a Martyr, which would have been a great joy to think that he was by Sufferings to be tormented to Death, to dye into eternal Life, that at the Resurrection he might rise with the more honour, and have

his

his seeming disgraceful Death recompenced with real and everlasting Pleasures: And certainly however sad his Sufferings might appear to those, whose hopes were only in this Life; yet to those whose Faith had enabled them to look beyond the Grave, and as were to anticipate the happiness of the next Life, by their practising the holiness of it in this.

They who by a well-lead Life did in and through Christ expect the Joys of the next, are willing at any rate to enjoy the Kingdom of Heaven, to these the thoughts of the cause of his Death, would have made it lovely, in spight of all the ugly Shapes and Forms the most cruel Tormentors can dress it in: So that the nobleness of the Cause of his dying would have so far sanctified the Act as to have made it valued and desired, as that which was at once his highest Honour and greatest Felicity.

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The Primitive Christians were so far from deeming that Death dishonourable which was suffered for the sake of Christ and the Gospel, that they became Candidates for it, and thought it an honour not only to do the *will of God*, but also to suffer for the doing it. For those purer times of Christianity were more innocent and Holy, than either to believe themselves or to teach others that to live wickedly was to do the *will of God*, there was then no Synod of *Dort* called to debauch Religion, under pretence of defending it. This Doctrine being too vile for any but a *Calvinist* to teach, or for any but a Thief to believe.

And tho' it seems strange that any Man should teach such Doctrines, yet I think it more strange that others should believe them, for they are too absurd to be embrac'd by any, but those who are as much Debauched in their Intellectuals, as Morals, and

I should think this Doctrine a libel upon the *Calvinists*, were there not too many Books as well as Men, to patronize and defend it even to this day. I cannot but admire that any Man should be so fond as to think that he can perswade another that he doth *the will of God*, whilst he Acts those Sins to the Commission of which God hath threatned eternal Vengeance.

How is it possible to perswade Men to a good Life? When they have been taught that their Salvation, doth entirely depend upon their *Predestination*, which being unconditional and immutable no Power of Man can reverse it, nor any religious Duty do that Man any good, who is by these Decrees as much excluded from Holiness, as he is from Happiness.

The Thief finding a holy Life so little advantageous to him in another World,

World, doth notwithstanding his bad Circumstances and worse Life infer to himself comfort from the Preachers grant, *that he had lived according to God's Will*, and therefore tho' the baseness of the Punishment which he now suffered for the Evils he had done, might justly mind him of the greater baseness of his Crimes; and tho' he might daily see in the Chains which he wore about him, the loss of his Liberty, and did expect that the loss of his Life would soon follow that of his Liberty; yet the very thoughts of his living *according to God's Will* do so comfort him in his Sufferings, that he shews no concern either for his present or future Interest, but seems as well pleas'd as if no Evil either had or should befall him.

He therefore upon the Preachers desire to know how he had lived, (that he might the better know how to direct his Conscience, and be able

to

to determine whether eternal Joys or everlasting Misery was like to be the Thiefs final Portion) makes as free a Confession of his Sins, as if he had been only giving an innocent History of his Life, relating his Villanies with as little regret as he committed them, giving the Preacher this following Relation of of his Life, *viz.*

That from his tender Years his Parents did instruct him in Learning, and intended to send him to the University, *but being doubtful where to send him because* Leiden University *was though Heretical,* Frankford *was deem'd as full of Gladiators and Drunkards, as* Leiden *of Hereticks, both of them being dangerous, the one for its Heresies, the other for its Impieties; at last the thoughtful Parents by the advice of their Preacher send their Son to* Frankford *supposing it less dangerous to breed him among*

Sword-Players and Drunkards, than Hereticks. After he had received his Parents blessing he goes to Frankford, *where be no sooner comes, but the excellency of the Wine, and the pleasantness of the Company he met with, made him soon consume all his Money in feasting, which his Parents hearing, and finding the Money which they did design for his improvement in Religion and Arts, to be spent in Vice and Vanity, call him home, after which they sent him to* France, *where tho' he doth acknowledge that they lived soberly, yet the Sobriety of the Place, doth not prevail with him to comply with the Sobriety of the Inhabitants, but those Vices which he learnt at* Frankford, *he brought to* France, *were he was so extravagant, that he was almost always drunk, and had a Gentlewoman of Pleasure as seldome from his Lap, as a glass from his Lip.*

In

In fine his Debauchees were too frequently acted, and too publickly committed to be long conceal'd from his Parents, whose concern for their Son's welfare, made them very inquisitive into his Conversation, and finding that his change of Place had made none in his Life, they therefore determine to send him to Geneva, *where least by reason of his Vices he should be unwilling to go, they threaten to allow him no Maintenance unless he would live there, hoping that the holyness of the Place would prevail with their Son to imitate the Sanctity of it.*

His Parents having been told by the Preacher that Geneva *was a Holy Place, where Vice is so far from being allowed, that Dancing it self is forbidden there.*

In a Place so Holy, the credulous Parents (being imposed only by the Preacher) believe that their Son

would

would live in Geneva like another Samuel in the House of the Lord, hoping he would now become more exemplary for Piety, than ever he had been for Debaucheries: His Parents therefore with great joy sent him there, where he no sooner comes but he meets with new incitements to his former Impiety, viz. with a Land-lady as beautiful and charming as Venus whose seeming Piety did as much forbid his extravagant thought and desires, as her Beauty did invite and encourage them the pretended sanctity of his Landlady made her seem a Saint, which obliged him for some time not to dare to attempt what at length he easily perpetrated.

After which, that the Thief might get the favour of the Consistory, he counterfeits the Saint in order to act the Devil, which that he might the better do, he seems to change his Life, and goes now

as zealously to the Church as he did formerly to the Tavern, he hears Sermons and the better to be taken notice off, he sits under the Pulpit, with a great Bible, fetching all the proofs which were cited by the Preacher from which pretended sanctity having gain'd esteem, he lays aside the Person of a Saint, to act that of a noble Man, wearing a Sword and keeping a Servant who served him in a double capacity, viz. that of a Servant and a Baud; who laying aside his Man's apparel, past for a femal, by wich means the Thief wanted neither Wine nor Women Cards nor Dice, nor Birds sweetly singing, the more to endear that conversation which had already charmed him out of his Reputation and Religion.

Here Reader you have the Relation of some of the Thiefs impieties which he doth recount to the Preacher with as little concern as he acted them at the heating of which, the

Preacher

Preacher doth not reprove him, nor represent to him the sadness of his Condition, nor direct him how to get the pardon of those Sins in another World for which he was condemn'd in this. Yea this condition of the Thief so deplorable as it is, is yet no farther taken notice of by the Preacher, then to ask him this question, *viz. that if he had known how severely he should have been punished for his Sins, whether he would have committed them, especially in so Holy a Place as* Geneva, *where dancing which in some places is reckoned as an accomplishment is deem'd a fault?*

The Thief had experienced that, tho' dancing in *Geneva* was counted an Offence, yet faults of a deeper dye were not so severely animadverted upon; because that as great Crimes were there acted as in other Places, and therefore the Thief laying aside the Hypocrisie of the

Place tho' not the Villany, goes on with the Relation of his Impiety, saying; *that he and his Companions after the Commission of many Villanies, which were too many to be conceal'd, and so notoriously ill that at length being brought before the Magistrate they were impriſon'd*, upon which the Thief began to think that now all his luxurious living was to end in Troubles and Diſgraces, which began now to ſit heavy upon him, inſomuch, that now he thinks himſelf as miſerable as he was ſinful, for that a ſad Scene of Sorrows was to ſucceed to his Impious Villanies; and all his choice Viands to be exchang'd for Bread and Water, Food tho' courſe and mean, yet too good for thoſe who had Rioted with the bleſſings of Heaven, and affronted the Almighty with the Mercies he had beſtowed on them; Such thoughts as theſe did ſometimes occaſion the Thief to

make

make melancholly Reflections upon his past Life, untill he and his Companions soon found that their usuage was not so bad as they did deserve or fear, for that others who were guilty of the same or greater faults, were as kind to them as if they had been as much allyed in Blood, as they were in Villany, these Men whose Estates were almost as great as the Crimes they had committed, the bravery of whose Cloaths made them as much gazed at as the Evils they had done, these did by their Feasting, Dancing and other Pleasures render the Prison so delightful that it became a place of Pleasure, rather than punishment, for such extravagancies were even here acted, that the Criminals did in a manner expiate their Crimes with as much pleasure as they did commit them, Dancing even to the shaking of the beams, and this they did while they were in Prison, a very,

sant Confinement this, if it had been but as innocent as it was diverting.

When the time of their Confinement was ended, they were brought before the Consistory, who upbrayded to them the baseness of their Crimes, after which in a full Assembly they were forced to lie prostrate before the Pulpit, and to ask God and the Church pardon for the Scandal which they had given, this being done the disgrace ended with the punishment, for at *Geneva* a multitude of Offenders took away the Scandal of the Offence, the Consuls Preachers and chief Citizens too, being there often punished for those very faults, which they condemn in others, but tho' the Scandal of the Thief's evil living did at *Geneva* end with the Punishment, yet the Thief was concern'd for fear least the report of his Crimes should reach *Holland*, which he took care to prevent by his dissembling with

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the Consistory, whose favour and good opinion he did endeavour to gain by exclaiming against his former wickedness, and did by his sighing, weeping and bewailing his sinful Life, so counterfeit the Penitent that every one did pity him.

After he had thus impos'd upon the Consistory, he went to do the like upon the Preacher, to whom he expresses much sorrow for the Evils which he had done; saying, *that he did now detest and hate those Sins, which he had formerly acted, and that he could not now without horror and amazement think on those Sins, which were now more the Subject of his Sorrow and Affliction, than ever they were of his Mirth and Pastimes; for that now he saw that only Shame and Confusion would be the Companions of his Life*; saying also, *that he did fear lest the Guilt of them should follow him into another*

world, and there condemn him to pains infinitely greater than words can express or thoughts imagine: Upon which he seems so Afflicted, that he pretends to fly the Society of Men, whom by his evil Life he had so much scandalized, and to deprive himself of the Comforts of Life as he had of the Innocency of it; purposing now to ramble up and down like a dost Sheep, and by sorrow for his Sins to make his Life as miserable as it was sinful.

The Preacher thinking the Thief to be as sorrowful for his Sins as he pretended, did comfort him with the Examples of *David*, *Solomon*, *Mary Magdalen* and others, and promised to write in his behalf to his Father, which he did, and so praised the Thief to his Parents, that they not only pardon him but also add forty Crowns to his former maintenance which he spends as impiously as before, *Reader*, tho' the Character

which

which the Thief hath here given of of himself be sufficiently detestable, yet the remaining part is much worse: For now every place becomes the Scene of his Villanies as he confesses, saying, *that in the Fields and Woods he acted the Robber, in the Towns a Cut-purse and a Thief; that he broke open Houses, and by force and deceit took away the Citizens Goods and Monies*; in this kind of Life he said *he lived Six Years in the Company of Knaves and Harlots*.

Thus he passed through *Holland* and *Germany*, without any other serious reflection but this, that all his Pleasures were to be ended in one half hour.

The Preacher having heard the Thiefs Confession, only tells him *that he had been a great Sinner, and that he did deserve a double hanging*, asking him *how he could with a laugh relate the Evils*,

which he had done, and whether he did not fear the loss of his Soul, nor dread to think where he must go when he did dye.

Such a Relation of Sin in the Thief ought to have occasion'd so much compassion in the Preacher as to have endeavour'd to keep the Thief from sporting at those Sins, which unrepented off, will bring him to everlasting weeping and mourning. It would have been proper to have told him that those Sins which had occasion'd his Condemnation in this World, would also bring him to a worse Condemnation in the next World; which would be to him, (if not prevented by prayer and Repentance) both endless and easeless; the Preacher only chides the Thief for his unreasonable laughter, at a time, when Tears and Prayers did more become the sadness of his Condition; which (however right made on by the Preach-

er and himself) was indeed deplorable, for however confident he was that he had done the *Will of God* in all that he did, and however confidently the Preacher did assert that he had *lived according to God's will.* Yet I believe he will find himself miserably deceiv'd, and have when he shall be Sommon'd before the Great Tribunal, more to Answer upon the account of the impiety of his Faith than Life, which yet was so bad that I know not what could be worse, unless it was his Faith; yet neither the badness of his Life or Faith doth prevail with the Preacher any farther to consider his condition than, to ask him where he thought he should go when he did dye.

To which the Thief replys, *that he thought he should go to Heaven as well as the Preacher*,, whom he proves (from the Preachers own words) not much better than himself,

self, and that the Preacher might not take this Supposition of the Thief for a Scandal, he proves his Supposition from the Preachers Confession, who had under his own hand acknowledg'd, *viz. that he was Blind in his understanding, that he had revolted from God, that he did daily offend God, and often without intermission violate his Laws, that his best works were meer Sins and Abominations*, had this been the summ total of the Preachers Impiety, yet his Life would have been sufficiently vicious to have proved him as bad as the Thief. But besides, these Crimes already mentioned, the Preacher did acknowledg *that he deserved eternal damnation, that he was prone to all Evil, and averse to all Good, with much more to the same purpose.*

All which the Preacher is so far from denying, that without a blush he

he confesseth the truth of the Thiefs Accusation, and adding impudence to his wickedness saith, *he did it for the Glory of God*; as if it either was, or could be for God's Glory to have his own Image Man, to do the Works of the Devil, as if the Almighty could be affronted for his Honour, or his Commands violated for his Glory. Yet this Doctrine so vile as it is, the Preacher doth assert saying, *that God wills his Elect to be Sinners that they may be humble*, which humility he saith doth consist in this, that we should be void of all that is good, a strange Assertion this, yet here is not in the Preachers Reply to the Thiefs Accusation either the least reflection on the Thief's Sins or excuse made for his own, but only a Confession made of as great Sins committed by himself, as he came to reprove in the Thief. The Preacher tis true confesseth his Sins, but signifies no Sorrow for committing

committing them, because they were done (as he saith) *for the Glory of God.*

Thus *Reader* according to these Men's opinions Men may honour God by offending him, become his Votaries whilst they do the works of darkness, Sin that Grace may abounds and do Evil that Good may come of it; what is this but to reverse the Gospel by turning Religion into Villany. Thus do some Men as much dishonour God by their misunderstanding the Gospel, as others do by their living a contradiction to it, which makes me think that Religion hath suffered as much by the *Calvinists* as *Hobbists*, *Atheism* it self being in some measure preferable to *Calvinism*, the last reflecting worse upon the Divine Goodness than the first, which only attempts to throw away God's Essence, and the other his Justice; it being certainly less reproachful to deny any ones Existence

istence than to load it with such frightful Crimes and Cruelties as might make one wish to be rid of it; and I appeal to any but themselves whether it be not more for the comfort and benefit of Mankind, to have no God at all, than such an one, who is delighted in his Misery, and made him for no other end than to glorifie himself in his destruction. Such Doctrines as these tend only to advance that *Atheism* and *Impiety* which they seem to Preach down, and I am certain that the *Calvinist* doth as much cast away the practise of Religion as the *Hobbist* doth the profession of it; insine, one is impious with Religion, the other without it. Considering how frail Man is of himself, how inclin'd to go beyond the bounds of his Duty, and how fond most Men are of the things of this Life, for the enjoyment of which, how willing they are to hazard the loosing the Joyes of the

next. Now if when Men do believe all the Evil consequences of an Evil and Debaucht Life, if notwithstanding this their belief of eternal Misery becoming their everlasting Portion, if Men I say under these Circumstances dare be vicious, when their Faith obliges them to be holy; whatvillanies may we not expect from those Doctrines, which teach Men to believe, that God will have them to be Sinners, that they may not rely on their good Works? What is this but to encourage Men in their wickedness? To invite them into eternal Flames, and as it were court them to be damned.

For what can so certainly exclude a Man from Heaven as his being taught that all his sinful Acts are as much the *will of God* as his most pious ones.

How can any Man think it necessary to change his Life? who hath been already taught that he doth

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the *will of God*, when he most extravagantly defies him; this one Principle once admitted is sufficient to baffle all good Life out of the World and to make all Exortations to it useless.

How is it possible to dissuade Men from an ill Life? When they find it useful and advantageous for the present, and are assured by their Teachers as well as their Interests 'twill do them no harm hereafter.

If (as the Preacher teacheth) we cannot be injured but by an absolute immutable and unconditional Decree, a Good Life would be not only insignificant but also troublesome.

This Doctrine of the Preacher makes the Thief so far from being willing to live religiously, that he declares against a Good Life, saying, *that knowing the danger of a good Life, he took care to avoid it, that he might not seek justification by it, and therefore resolved without*

doing

doing any good Works to rely only on the Grace of God for Salvation: A very easie way to Heaven this, if it was but as safe, for who would ever be damn'd if a confident relyance on Christ for Salvation would but obtain it, if it was as easie to go to Heaven as these Men would make it to what purpose would Religion or their own preachings be?

The Preacher finding the Thief to draw inferences from his Doctrines, which did not consist with his Reputation to grant, because they were destructive of a good Life, chides the Thief, telling him, *that he did interpret his Doctrine as if it had been the Cause of his evil Deeds*, saying, *God forbid, and that he did only intend that Men should not seek to be justified by Works but Faith.*

This Answer the Thief proves as unsatisfactory as the former, by shewing *that if a Man can be saved without good Works, that then they*

they are useless and 'tis to no purpose to do them. So that the Thiefs inference which the Preacher blames, is the natural result of the Preachers own concessions; for if good Works must be avoided that we may not rely on them, and if the omitting them will do us (as many Men think) good in this Life and no harm in the next, who can we think will do violence to his inclination, or spoil his Interest, for the doing of that which will not benefit him either in this Life or the next. So that a sinful Life must needs follow from a Mans flying every thing that is good; the Thief therefore must needs infer as he did, or believe other Doctrines, than those which he had learn't of the Preacher, who now preaches down a good Life, with as much Zeal and Eagerness as other live it down.

I shall not now enter upon the dispute whether we are justified by Faith

Faith or good Works, becauſe they are both in and through the Merits of Chriſt neceſſary to Salvation, and if Faith hath the priority in Nature becauſe it is neceſſary that I ſhould believe the Chriſtian Religion before I can practiſe it. Yet good Works are as eſſentially neceſſary as Faith can be, becauſe it is as much every ones duty to live according to the Goſpel as it is to believe it; and I ſee no reaſon why Men ſhould magnify Faith above good Works, unleſs it be to teach Men to believe as well as to live Religion out of the World, neither do I believe that any thing is more deſtructive to all true Piety, than to teach Men, that God doth out of his free Grace without any good Work of ours impute the righteouſneſs of Chriſt to them whom he doth Predeſtinate as much as if they had perform'd themſelves the obedience which Chriſt perform'd for them.

Good God where will not the Impiety of ſome Men carry them! Here the Preacher teacheth ſuch a Faith as is conſiſtent with our Sins, this Faith will (according to theſe *Calviniſtical* Principles) bring a Man to Heaven without holineſs and ſecure him from the Regions of Darkneſs, whilſt he is doing the Deeds of it, this is a Faith (which if it was true) would do even more then Miracles, *viz.* Reconcile contradictions, for it makes a Man at one and the ſame time a Saint and a Devil, a Faith by which a Man may believe and be damned together, a Faith by which a Man may be ſaved by Chriſt, whilſt he doth affront him, and go to Heaven hereafter tho he lives like a Devil here.

The Thief finding this Faith as agreeable to his deſires, as it was to his Life, doth readily imbrace it, becauſe by it, he could reconcile Heaven to his Sins, and believe himſelf

into

into eternal Bliss in spight of all that an evil Life can do to the contrary.

This Faith (so bad as it is) the Thief calls *his pure and unsported Faith*, because it kindly gave him the hopes of Heaven and the injoyment of his Vices together, and did not disturb his evil Life with any after fears of those endless Torments which did imbitter the injoyments of others who had done no more to deserve or fear the Divine Vengeance than the Thief, or the Preacher; so that it was not likely that he should change his Life, since he found it as agreeable to his Interest as it was to his Faith; I cannot imagine how the Preacher could so much as hope to bring the Thief to a good Life, when he had arriv'd at that height of Folly and Impudence, as to affirm it his chief Art and Interest to know no Law or good Works, saying, *that good Works*

do

do make no Man good, nor evil works make any Man bad, positively affirming *that no evil work but Infidility can damn a Man*; saying, *that where there is Faith, there Sin cannot hurt*.

The Preacher to all these Blasphemies of the Thief, which but to name would move a Christian to indignation, for they who love the holy Jesus or his Religion cannot with patience see it thus treated by not only its Professors but also Teachers, to hear such horrid Impieties avouch't for Religion, and no help afforded to rescue a dying Soul from such evil Doctrines as these, shews too senseless a concern for that which next to the Salvation of our own Souls, ought to be most dear to us, viz. The Salvation of our Brethren; which these arguments of the *Calvinists* cannot effect, nay, their teachings are so far from promoting Piety, that they destroy it;

for

For after a Man is taught that a good Life is not necessary in order to his attaining the Kingdom of Heaven, he will presently conclude it to no purpose to live well here, when it will do him no good hereafter, what can a good Life signifie to those who have been taught to place the whole of Religion upon a Faith without Works, such a Faith as this cannot serve any End of Piety, for it tends only to people Hell, and to fill the Earth with confusion, and therefore the Thief having been thus encouraged to Sin, tells the Preacher (upon his advising him to keep the Commandments if he would enter into Life) *that he did admire to hear him talk so strangely, and to change his own Faith, that he might perswade the Thief to change his Life, which he is so far from being prevailed on to do*, that he boldly tells the Preacher *that he had deceived the Faithful in telling*

ting to the Divine Laws and commandments that which was due to God only.

The Preacher not insisting on the necessity of a good Life, but crying it down that he might magnifie Faith, did thereby oblige the Thief to be vitious, whereas if the Preacher had been really desirous of the Thiefs Salvation he should have awaken'd him into a sight and sense of his Sins, by shewing him the necessity of a good Life, and the danger of a wicked one; for want of teaching the Thief the necessity of a good Life, the Preacher leaves him in more wickedness than he found him.

'Tis true the Preacher tells the Thief *that he must abstain from sin*, but why he should preach such Doctrine to him I cannot imagine, nor assign any reason why a Man should decline doing that which is profitable and pleasant here, when it will do him no hurt hereafter.

Thus the Thiefs evil inclinations, and the Preachers worſe Principles have made him proof againſt all good Exhortations, inſomuch that he now boldly bids defiance to a good Life and thoſe who follow it, ſaying to them *begon ye followers of good works, and follow me who build my Salvation only upon the Grace and Mercy of God*, ſaying, *and that from all the Authority of* Luther *and* Civin, *that a Chriſtian was ſo rich after he was baptized that he cannot knowingly and willingly loſe his Salvation by any Sins how great ſoever they be, unleſs he refuſe to believe.*

The Preacher doth not deny either the Authority or the Doctrine, but only tells the Thief *that he had finely committed many Sins, and that it was fit that he ſhould be inſtructed in that will of God in which he will be obeyed by him.* But what obligation any one can have

have to that which is impossible I cannot understand, neither can I believe that God will oblige Men to act contrary to his own Decrees concerning them, neither can I think of any Motive powerful enough to induce the Preacher to change his Life, and to live in obedience to those Laws which according to his own Faith he neither did nor could obey. It being impossible for him to live otherwise then he did, all his Actions being from all Eternity determin'd by an absolute immutable and unconditional Decree, the belief of which Doctrine did inable him to defend his impieties, rather then perswade him to forsake them.

When Men are by such Doctrines as these secured in their Sins, I cannot see what less than a Miracle can diswade them from the Commission of those Sins which they find profitable and pleasant here,

and no ways injurious to them hereafter.

For if the Profits and Pleasures of this World, do and have prevail'd on some Men to commit Sin, who did yet believe that Sin will without Repentance damn them in another World: How much more will they do it who have been taught that their Sins will do them no harm? Had the Thief been taught to believe that those very Sins which occasion'd the loss of his Life, would also occasion the loss of his Soul: It might have done him good, but alas! the unhappy Thief is by his ill imbib'd opinions enabled to baffle whatsoever can be said to him concerning a holy Life, which he most effectually doth, by asserting a twofold *will in God*, one of which he calls *God's occult will*, the other *his revealed will*, saying, *that God by his occult will intends many things*

should be done, which he declared he would not have done; and this he endeavours to prove by the example of Pharaoh, *saying, that God did by* Moses *declare according to his reveal'd Will, he would have* Pharaoh *let the Children of* Israel *go, tho' by his occult Will he would not have him let them go,* most blasphemously affirming, *that God hath by his hidden Will appointed those to commit Sin, whom by his reveal'd Will he hath commanded to live well*: This impious Notion of the Thief had arm'd him against whatever might be otherwise useful to bring him from his wicked course of Life, which was like to do him more harm in another World, than it had or could do in this.

The Preacher having admitted these two contrary Wills in God, finds himself unable to resist the force of the Thiefs arguments for

a wicked Life, there being no way to secure a good Life, but by denying these two contrary Wills in God. The Preacher not taking this Method, found all his Arts and Arguments useless to perswade the Thief to a good Life, for if the Preacher offers never so many Motives from holy Scripture, the Thief is by this distinction enabled to defend his Crimes with as much ease as he did commit them, and doth thereby render the Preachers next question ineffectual; it being indeed to no purpose to ask the Thief whether he thought he did *the will of God* by sinning, which tho' the Preacher had formerly granted, yet now finding the mischievousness of his Grant, was willing to recall it, but the Thief finding the usefulness of this distinction, answers the Preachers question with as much ease as he did propose it, saying, *that if the Preacher did by* the Will of

God

God *understand his reveal'd will that then by sinning he did not do* the Will of God, *but if by* the Will of God *he meant* Gods hidden Will, he saith, *that then by sinning he did* the Will of God.

Thus the Thief did distinguish himself out of his Religion and Happiness, and is by the help of this distinction become proof against all Arguments which can be brought for his Conversion; and therefore it was to no purpose in the Preacher (after he had admitted these two *wills in God*) to tell the Thief that he ought to have regarded to *the reveal'd will of God*, for why should he have regard to *the reveal'd will of God*, who did believe that whatsoever God did command by his *reveal'd will*, he design'd the contrary by his hidden *will*, by which he did often, if not always make void his *reveal'd will*.

This Faith which the Thief had learnt of the Preacher, makes him hug and applaud himself in his Vices, triumphing over the Preachers insignificant Discourse, and challenging him to answer the Arguments which his Faith had taught him to make against a good Life, insomuch that he boldly argues against a good Life, saying, *if I am reprobated, all the care and diligence which I can use will do me no good, yea tho' I do the good works of all the Saints I could not be saved; but if I am Predestinated, Sin can do me no harm, because neither my Sins nor the Sins of the whole world are able to defeat omnipotence, or revers the Decrees of Heaven, or change that which is immutable and unconditional, for if it be immutable, how can it be changed, and if it be unconditional then a good Life cannot* (saith the Thief) *be the condition*

tion of my entring into bliss, and of enjoying those pleasures which are above. To this Discourse of the Thief the Preacher offers no answer because he knew the Thiefs Arguments were agreeable to his Faith, altho' they did not only not favour a good Life, but were also inconsistent with it; yet the Preacher doth not reprehend the Thief for his impious Opinions, but lets him go on in his Sins, without endeavouring to wake him out of that Lithargy into which his Sins had cast him. The Preacher finding it was impossible to change the Thiefs Life, without first changing his Faith, doth no longer perswade him to a good Life, but only asks him whether he did never hear God calling him to Repentance and newness of Life.

To which the Thief answer'd, *that he had heard God calling him eternally, but that he could not*

obey him, because God did by his internal Call Predestinate him to disobey his external Call, saying, *that God's calling externally, did signifie little, unless he had internally called and Predestinated him to do what he was pleased to command*, for saith the Thief, *it proceeds from God's eternal Decrees, that he gives Faith to some and denies it to others, and that according to this Decree, God doth graciously soften the hearts of his Elect, whilst he leaves others to their own Obduratemess and Malice.*

Reader, were these things indeed so as the Thief had represented them, a good Life would then be both needless and insignificant, for that according to this Doctrine, tho God call never so often yet this will do him no good, because of an immutable Decree made to the contrary, for saith the Thief, *that tho*

some

some are converted by the Preaching of the Gospel, yet this saith he, *is not to be ascribed to Man's free will, but to God, who hath from all eternity chosen in Christ those who are his, without any regard to their good works*, were this true, what can a good Life signifie?

Tho' this Doctrine be false, impious, and irrational, yet the Preacher doth not so much as reprehend the Thief for the Blasphemies which he uttered; but instead of endeavouring to prevent the Ruin of a dying Soul, he now seems to oblige him to despair, because he could not keep him from presuming, or else he would not have asked him whether he did not think himself a Reprobate.

To which the Thief answers (tho' without any concern for his present or future Interest) *that he thought himself reprobated, and that not without*

without cause, for saith he, *God hath Reprobated the greatest Part of Mankind out of his mere good pleasure, that by their death he might glorifie his great Name.* Good God! that Men should arrive at so great a height of Impiety and Madness, as to believe that God would from all Eternity without any regard to his Actions create Man to damn him. Is it possible to believe that God who had declared himself to be gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great pitty, that he should not only say, but also swear, *that he did not desire the death of a sinner*, that I say he should notwithstanding his Word, and his Oath, everlastingly torment his own Image Man? Is so impiously vile, but to conceive, that it is enough to make a Man not only forfeit his Christianity but also his Humanity too, for certainly to believe and assert such Blasphemies as these of our good

God,

God, is proper only to Devils, and to those who count Religion a cheat, and the Gospel it self a Fable; for surely none but such could talk so dishonourably of God as to make God's Glory the Cause not only of Men's Misery, but also of their Sins.

What is this but to libel God and Religion? to affirm that he punishes us for those faults which he Decree'd us to commit, forcing us to Sin, that he might destroy us for the doing that which by his Decrees he oblig'd us to.

This Calumny is so false and vile, that if it were true, I know not what would be said worse of the Devil himself; yet this Doctrine so vile as it is, is so far from being reproved by the Preacher, that he believes it as well as the Thief, and impiously affirms that God hath from all Eternity, without any regard to Sin, by his pure absolute Decree, rejected the greatest part of

Mankind,

Mankind, and created them for destruction, saying that if any Man doth affirm that God hates no Man as he is Man, and made him, he contradicts the Apostle.

This Doctrine is so injurious to God so vile in its self and so uncomfortable to Mankind, that I wonder it was not cast out of the World with as much horror as it was with shame brought into it, and however these Doctrines come to be part of the *Calvinists* Creed, yet I must confess I think them so vile that I admire any should be so wicked as to teach it, or believe them.

Those Doctrines being in my judgment unfit to be believed of God, which are a scandal to Man; for let a Man be never so just as to one Will, when he is unjust to the other, the Innocency of one Will can never excuse the injustice of the other, and I cannot conceieve how those Doctrines can be thought an

honour

honour to God, which are a reproach to Man, and I am inclin'd to believe that however confident the *Calviniſts* are to teach theſe Doctrines, yet their Hearers ſhould fear to believe them: For it ſeems ſtrange to me that the Notion which Men generally have of Juſtice in this World, ſhould not make them fearful to ſay thoſe things of God which they would think reproachful to be ſaid of themſelves, and I find the Thief in ſpight of his Faith, (which did ſo much favour him in his Sins) begin to deſpond of his Salvation; for upon the Preachers asking him if he did not think himſelf a Reprobate he preſently conſeſt his fears, which he could not eaſily be rid of; for notwithſtanding the Preacher adviſed him not to Deſpair, yet he becomes ſad and melancholy, and to fear leaſt a Life ſo ſhameful as his, ſhould meet with with an End as Tragical as Diſmal, ſo that he now

diſpairs

despairs of attaining that Happiness which not long since he expected to enjoy, and asks *how it is possible for one whose Life hath been so shameful as his not to despond of injoying that goodness which he had so often affronted no less by his Faith than Life, especially since he found Infants as well as the Aged are condemned before they have done Good or Evil: And therefore he infers that when Infants are thus treated by Almighty God before they have done Good or Evil, and consider that they are not only the Children of* Turks and Heathens, *but also the baptized Infants of believing Parents who are thus used, he thinks it reasonable to fear least those Sins for which he was condemn'd to lose his Life, might also occasion him to loose his Soul.* In such doleful Circumstances as these the Preacher doth not endeavour to bring the

Thief

Thief from his disponding thoughts of his Reprobation, nor from his evil Sentiments of Gods severity towards Infants, neither doth he offer one word in reproof of either, which makes the Thiefs Case very deplorable to meet with a Guide who in his last Agonies is so far from being able to help and assist him that instead of rescuing him by his Exhortations and Councils from his sad condition, he doth as it were assign him to the Sufferings of all those Miseries which he pretends in so much kindness to free him from, which makes me think, that as that Man's Life is to be despaired of whose Physician is so far from being able to Cure his Distemper, that all his Applications if relyed on will certainly destroy him, so may his Soul be justly despired of whose Guide is so far from healing his Soul's Disease, that he encreaseth all its Maladies, and will

if he doth not find it sick, make it so.

This seems to me to be the poor Thief's Case, who is now like to suffer more by the ill conduct of the Preacher, than by the Sentence of the Judge, or by the Execution of the Hangman. His Chains are not so disgraceful to him as the Preachers Doctrine is dangerous, for the disgrace of his Chains will end with his natural Life, but the other will last as long as Eternity its self shall endure: The Haugman did by his Office deliver the Thief from the trouble and shame of a miserable Life, but the Preacher doth either through the Ignorance of his Office, or his willful perverting of it, as it were assign him over to all the endless Torments of another World; where I am afraid he will suffer more upon the account of his Faith than Life, and tho' I confess he hath reason to bewail his unhappy-

ness

ness in meeting with Companions to draw him to Sin, yet he will have much more reason to bewail himself that he unhappily met with such a Guide, who taught him to believe, worse than he had lived, for the viciousness of his Life was only to be exceeded by the greater Impiety of his Frith.

The Preacher he finding the Thief unwilling to change his Life, proceeds to confirm him in the belief of his own Reprobation. And this he doth by an Argument drawn from Mens being by the Almighty permitted to kill an Ox or a Sheep for their use, or to hunt a Hare for their pleasure, from which he infers that if a Man can justly do this to inferiour Creatures for his pleasure, that then the great God may much more justly reject for his Glory his Creatures, saying, *that it is a thousand times more just that all the Creatures in Heaven and*

Earth

Earth should serve by their eternal Death, for the demonstration of the Glory of God's Divine Majesty, than that the killing of a fly or a knit should serve for the demonstration of the Honour of all the Men in the world. And this he doth most extravagantly affirm ought to be so far from being disliked in God, that the Elect ought to give thanks that God hath reprobated the Wicked, that he might evidence how much he loved his Elect, and what is more strange he confidently saith, *that the wicked themselves ought not to complain that they are reprobated, but rather to give God thanks.*

Where will not the Impiety of Men lead them, and what will they fear to say or do when they dare thus believe? What can we expect from such a Faith as this, which is so far from teaching Men to be religious, that it is a shame not only to

religious, but even to an honeſt Man to own it: It being at once both Impious and Irrational, becauſe it makes Men talk againſt Heaven and their own Intereſt.

It is certainly a great Sin to think diſhonourably of God, but ſurely it is much worſe to blaſpheme him, we ought to adore by ſpeaking more vilely of him than we dare do one of another. I am perſwaded that ſuch bold Impieties as theſe, will not long paſs unpuniſhed, for God will not always ſuffer himſelf to be affronted by Duſt and Aſhes, and certainly a greater affront cannot be offered to the Almighty than to think any Man ſo much to be hated by him as to damn him only for his pleaſure, who had not firſt provok'd him by a wicked and impenitent Life; no certainly, our gracious God only makes them the Subjects of his eternal Fury, who have contemn'd his Favours, and they only

feel

feel his Wrath, who would not except of his Mercy unless they might injoy that and their Sins together.

Notwithstanding the Preacher boldly affirms, *that it is a thousand times more just, that all the Creatures in Heaven and Earth should only for God's pleasure serve his Glory by their death. Tho' they had not offended him, than that the death of a Knit or a Fly should serve for the honour or pleasure of all the Men in the world.* I cannot but dissent from him for these two Reasons.

1st. Because there is no Parallel between our destroying Creatures inferiour to ourselves, when they are of another Species, and are not able to make Pacts and Covenants with us, we being not obliged by any Oaths or Promises to them, may without doing them any wrong, make

make use of that Power which God hath given us over them; but

2*dly*, The case is different in respect of the time of using our Power over them, the pain being but short that we put them to; either in our killing them for our use, or hunting them for our pleasure, so that tho' our gratious God might (as he is absolute Lord of all Men and things) have treated us as he did please. Yet since he hath by promises encouraged us to serve him, he will reward those Services which himself hath enjoyn'd, and which we have undergone for the sake of Christ and the Gospel: So that whatever fears we may have upon the account of God's being Sovereign Lord, yet they will soon vanish when we consider the many promises which he hath made to encourage our obedience, especially when

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all his other Attributes do speak as much Goodness to us, as his Omnipotence doth power over us; we may with as much comfort expect the performance of his Promise if we do well, as fear his Anger when we do Evil, by which it is manifest that a Power limited by Promises and Conditions is vastly different from a free Power; and the difference is as great in respect of the time as it is in respect of the Agent. For tho' a Man may kill an Ox or a Sheep for his use, yet surely he could not unprovok'd only to shew his Power give the Ox or Sheep an Eternal Being for no other purpose then to give them an eternal Misery. I cannot think any thing called Man could be so inhumane; for whosoever can be so cruel, he must have put off Humanity on this side and Hell, commenced Devil, in order to be used like one hereafter.

That

That can never be for the honour of God which is a disgrace to Man. It is impossible that God should delight himself in the ruine and destruction of his Creatures, or be pleas'd with the everlasting Sighs and Tears of those whom he did once so much love and honour as to create them in his Image, and Redeem them with the Blood of his Son, it is I say incredible that after such kindness expressed towards Man, God should Predestinate him to be wicked and then damn him for being so, to do this would be so wicked and unjust, so contrary to his Goodness, and so uncomfortable to believe, that I know not which to wonder at most, whether there should be Men vile enough to teach these Doctrines, or that any should be such Fools as to believe them upon their being taught, both of them seeming to me equally unreasonable.

The Preacher ſeems not only to believe this Doctrine of God's reprobating for his good pleaſure whom he pleaſes, but alſo is become ſo extravagant as to aſſert that the Reprobate themſelves ought not to complain of it, but rather to give God thanks, that by their Death they can glorifie his holy Name.

To this and much more ſpoken by the Preacher to the ſame purpoſe, the Thief not daring to contradict the Doctrine which he had been taught by the Preacher. Anſwers to the Preachers Aſſertion, by a diſtinction, ſaying, *that if a Man did only reſpect his own private Good, he had then cauſe to complain of the ſeverity of thoſe Decrees by which he was condemned to everlaſting Flames, and this he thinks reaſonable to believe, becauſe it would be againſt the Nature of Mankind to give thanks for Troubles and Afflictions,*

and

and to take eternal Torments for a Favour, or Damnation for a Bleſſing. Theſe certainly would ſit too uneaſie and heavy on thoſe who ſuffered them; to make them ſo far miſtake their Intereſt as to take them for Obligations; no certainly on the contrary, his perpetual Torments would make him with horror remember the Author of his Miſery, rather than to move him to be thankful for the kindneſs of never dying Calamities. Man who was thus treated would certainly make perpetual imprecations againſt the Author of his Miſery, rather than thank him that he was ſo far pleaſed to conſult his Glory, as to make his Miſery to be endleſs, that his Glory might be ſo too; and therefore I cannot but imagine that tho' the Thief doth acknowledge that for a publick good it is beſt for a Man to be damned; yet this Doctrine is ſuf-

ſufficiently contradicted by the reaſon of Mankind, as well as by the woeful experience of thoſe who are obliged to ſuffer any great Calamity; and however, this Doctrine is not contradicted by the Preacher, who doth not reprove the unreaſonableneſs of it, but only tells the Thief *that it was better for him to ſpend his time in being obedient to God's Word, than in the vindication of the* Doctrine of Reprobation, *which he thought he had firmly fixed in his mind to the great neglect of the Practice of thoſe Duties which through his Repentance and Faith in Chriſt might have prevented that Reprobation which he did now fear would ſhortly become his portion.*

Here the Preacher forgets his former Aſſertions, wherein he had made obedience to Gods Laws, and Preaching ſo far from being

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to all people beneficial, that he makes it do much harm to those who are Reprobated, saying, *that to them it proves a Snare, and an occasion of their greater Damnation.* And (according to the Preacher) it is made thus fatal to them, not for any fault committed by them to deserve to be the Subjects of God's Fury, but upon the account of his Decrees made for that purpose.

This Doctrine is so rediculous that a reasonable Man would neither think it did deserve or need a Confutation.

After such Preachments as these I do not understand of what use Religion can be, when Men have been taught that those Ordinances of God, which are to the Elect the ways and means of Salvation; do to those who are reprobated become Snares, and the means of their Condemnation, this makes the

Thief boldly affirm, *that they who are Reprobated, cannot obey God, believe, nor be justified or saved, and that because God will not convert them.*

If against this Blasphemy of the Thief it be objected that God doth frequently make offers of his Grace to all, and so consequently to the Reprobate; to this the Thief saith, *that God doth offer his Grace to the Reprobate themselves, tho' not with an intent to benefit and save them but with a design to make them the more unexcusable, that he may punish them the more grievously*; what is this but to make God as very a Hypocrite as themselves?

To this Doctrine, so vile as it is, the Preacher readily assents, saying, *that God did call some Men to an ill Life, in order to make them the Subjects of his Anger, and the Examples of his Fury,*

which

which that they may be, the Preacher saith, *that God deprives them of the Power of hearing his word to their advantage.*

This Answer of the Preacher is so full of discouragement to a good Life, that I cannot imagine what more powerful Argument the Preacher could make use of to confirm the Thief in a ill Life, then thus to run down a good one.

This makes me think that as some Seeds will not grow in some Grounds, that so a good Life cannot be attain'd by such Doctrines as have been taught by the Preacher, and believed by the Thief. Doctrines which carry on the work of Darkness as effectually as if an Emissary of Darkness had been sent from thence to teach it, Sathan and all his Agents being unable to blaspheme God, and Religion more than the Thief, and Preacher have done.

'Tis certainly a very preposterous way of endeavouring to bring a Man from an evil Life, by decrying the Benefits of a good One, for can any Man so much as believe or hope to bring that Man to a good Life, who hath been already taught that it may prove a Snare to him, and occasion his deeper Damnation.

Alas! Such Doctrines as these which make preaching useless, must necessarily make a good Life so too, for why should any one desire to lead a good Life, when it may become a Snare to him when he believes it not only useless, but also injurious to him. If such Doctrines as these be not invitations and encouragements to an evil Life, I know not what is or can be. I am sure the Thief made this use of them, and did therefore fly all Sermons, Exhortations and good Works. The Preacher being

as

as ready to approve of the Thiefs Blaſphemy, as the other to utter it; lets him now injoy that Faith, by which he might live like a Divil and yet injoy Heaven.

For this is a Faith by which a Man may juſtifie his Sins to God's Face, as well as commit them in his Preſence; for when he ſhall be brought before the Divine Tribunal, and be ask'd why he did not live according to God's Commandments, he may (according to theſe Men's Principles) reply, *I have lived as I have been taught by my Paſtors and Parents, and I thought theſe were more wiſe to chooſe a Religion for me than I was for my ſelf; I have as much done your Will as any other Creature, and I do hope becauſe I have lived according my Faith, that I may be of the number of thoſe happy Ones, who may glorifie your Holy Name by*

my Salvation, and that you will not magnifie your self in my destruction. I have I confess lived in those Sins to which according to your reveal'd Will you have threatned everlasting Torments, and according to which I can expect nothing but your Anger and Indignation; but yet since by your secret will you did determine I should violate your reveal'd will, I hope that my complyance with the latter will excuse my violation of the former, I did not in earnest pray, read Sermons, or receive the Sacraments, because tho' I found to have done these Duties would have been profitable to me according to your reveal'd Will, yet believing that according to your secret will it would be dangerous and destructive to have done them, I thought I should do more for my own Safety, as well as your Glory, wholly to avoid all good Works,

works, and to rely only on your Mercy for my Salvation.

When Men are once satisfied with such a Faith as this, I do not see how they can be prevail'd on to lead holy Lives, for if the *Calviniſtical* Notions concerning the Divine Decrees were indeed true, a good Life would be uſeleſs and inſignificant, and what is worſe troubleſome too, ſo that this belief doth as it were give Men up to a vicious Life here, againſt which Life there are ſo many threats in holy Scripture, that I am inclin'd to believe that thoſe who boaſt moſt of their Predeſtination; do yet ſometimes admit of deſponding thoughts about their Salvation.

For however, bold ſome Men are in ſetting up two different Wills in God, as contrary to one another as his Laws are to their Lives, and however ſecure they ſeem to be in

in their vain hopes of being Predestinated to eternal Life while they are doing the Deeds of Darkness, yet the reveal'd Will of God speaks too many bitter things against them to be comforted by his hidden Will, which he now makes use of, that he may excuse his violation of God's reveal'd Will; yet his confidence of his Salvation will not prevent his being doom'd to eternal Destruction, for the truth of God is not varied according to the sentiments of Men, and the Thief and those of his persuasion will find I believe that a bold presumption of Mercy is no sign of Election, nor an ill Life any qualification for Heaven; and tho' the Thief, as the Preacher tells him, had shewn no fruites of his Election, so I believe, however confident he now is, yet when summon'd before the Divine Tribunal he will have no hopes of his Salvation, and tho' the Thief

is now so confident as to think that notwithstanding his ill Life, it was yet more manifest than the Sun at noon day, that he ought not to despair, yet his confidence will then vanish, and he too late find himself miserably deceived, in believing that his Salvation was founded upon his Election.

The Thief having by these Doctrines learnt to reconcile Heaven to his Sins, and the Deeds of Darkness to the Rewards of the Children of Light, is resolved not to make his Life dismal by Repentance, tho' he had made his Death dishonourable by his Crimes.

Thus according to *Calvinistical* Principles nothing is necessary to Salvation but a strong opinion of our Election, and Adoption in Christ Jesus.

That those who are Elected and Adopted by the holy Jesus shall be

saved,

saved, I do most firmly believe, but I cannot think any Man either Elected or Adopted by him who neglecting to live a good Life is so confident as to think that upon the vain supposition of his being Predestinated that an evil Life will not Damn him, for surely if we are by Nature the Children of Wrath, we are much more so by Sin, being by the Commission of it become Enemies to God we have more reason to dread his Anger, than expect his Favour, and to fear least an imaginary Decree should not be able to keep the Wrath of God from falling on us.

The rest of the Preachers and Thiefs discourse being as blasphemous and as useless as what he hath already said. I shall no farther consider it, than as it shall serve to assert my last Engagement, *viz.* To give such an account of the Divine

Divine Decrees as may through God's Grace prevent others from falling into the like horrid Opinions which the Thief had imbibed, and this I shall endeavour to do.

First by shewing that an absolute, immutable and unconditional Decree is inconsistent with the Divine Goodness. And

Secondly, by shewing that such a Decree would make Religion useless.

1st. An absolute immutable and unconditional Decree is inconsistent with the Divine Goodness.

That God's Goodness is equal to his other Perfections, is a truth so Universally acknowledged, that it needs no proof. Now how an infinite Goodness can be delighted with the destruction of the Work of his own hands, or glory in the everlasting Weeping and Mourning

of

of those to whom he was once so kind, as to redeem them with the blood of his Son, from all the Evils which they were subjected to by *Adam's* Fall, that he should by so inestimable a price as the blood of his Son, purchase our Redemption, and that he should afterward without any provocation assign us to eternal Misery, is so improbable and so unjust an imputation to the Divine Goodness, that I know not what can be said worse of the vilest of Men, or of the Devil himself.

The doing this may speak him Omnipotent indeed, thus to raise to himself Trophies from the ruin of his People, but surely such an Omnipotence, without Goodness, would be a little for God's Honour as for Man's Comfort, and so consequently not to be believed of God, who hath oblig'd himself by promise to Reward with eternal

Life

Life all thoſe who Fight manfully under his Banners, againſt Sin, the World and Devil, and it is certain that he will perform what he hath promiſed, and will not diſappoint the Hopes of his People, nor doom them to never dying Sighs and Groans, for no other intent then to glorifie his Name in their deſtruction, for to do this would be contrary to his Word, his Promiſe and his Oath, and muſt therefore be inconſiſtent with his Goodneſs, and not to be believed; becauſe it is neither probable nor reaſonable that God ſhould make ſuch difference between his own Creatures upon no other Motive then his own Will, to do this would be unjuſt in a Man, and therefore not to be attributed to the Great God.

For who would not think it to be at once both diſhonourable and unjuſt in a Man to be always beating

beating and tormenting some of those under his Command, only to shew his Power over them, or what is as bad that he might endear himself to his Favorites, who notwithstanding his kindness to them, did as little deserve his love as those whom he made the miserable Subjects of his endless Fury: For it cannot excuse the partiallity of his Actings towards them; to pretend that their disobedience to his Commands had occasion'd his Wrath against them, when himself at the same time had Predestinated them not to obey him.

However confident these Men talk of the righteous Judge of all the Earth, yet to do this would be so vile, that as bad as the World is, I cannot think any Man (were it in his power) bad enow to do it, and therefore do deem it dishonourable to God to impute those Cruelties to him, which the most Impious

yious would abhor, and even Nature it ſelf ſtartle and recoil at. For ſuch Acts as theſe are ſuitable to thoſe Natures only who being doomed to eternal Miſery themſelves, do endeavour to make others Torments as laſting as their own; for tho' in Hell it may be ſome eaſe to the pains of the damned, or at leaſt ſome ſatisfaction to their Malice perpetually to torment each other, yet to affirm this of God or Man, would be diſhonourable to both, eſpecially to God, and as to Man, who would ever affirm that Perſon to be either an honeſt or a good Man, who ſhould ſend his Servant to the Gallies, and there make him a Slave for Life, and that for no other reaſon then becauſe he did not at his Maſters command ride ſuch or ſuch a Journey, when at the ſame time his Maſter had chain'd him ſo faſt that he might as well re-

move

move the Earth as to go beyond the length of his Chain, neither would it make the Master a jot the honester Man, tho' he had at the same time encourag'd him by all the fair, promises imaginable, nay, tho' he had sworn to him that he did not desire to send him to the Gallies, but that he had much rather that he would go his Journey, perform his Commmands, and be happy in his Favour, if after all these Invitations to a holy Life, he had made it impossible for him to obey, all these pretences of the Masters Innocence, Pitty or kindness, would only serve to make his Master the greater tyranizing Hypocrite; and I appeal to the Sentiments of Mankind, whether such proceedings in the Master, would not be thought much more reprovable than the imaginary fault which he threatned to punish so severely in the Servant, nay, it would

would be inconsistent with the Masters Justice and Goodness thus to punish faults of his own making, which leads me to another reason; why an absolute immutable and unconditional Decree is not to be admitted. And that is

Secondly because such a Decree would make Religion useless.

Altho' this hath been in a great measure proved in the foregoing pages, yet I shall further shew it, by replying to some Objections which many of the *Calvinistical* Party do Glory and Triumph in, *viz.*

First, That all Men do so much dread the Wrath of God, and are so afraid to be damned, that these absolute Decrees are not so destructive to Piety, as those who oppose them, would make the World believe, because (say they) *many who teach this Doctrine are*

Men

Men of the best lives and most exemplary Conversations

To this Objection, (if it be not rather a Compliment to their Party than a Truth) I Answer, that those of them who thus live, do not lead their Lives according to their Faith, which makes their Salvation to depend upon their Election, which they hold to be absolute, now if those only shall be saved who are thus Elected, then a good Life is useless; for unless it can reverse the Decree of Heaven, and change the Sentence of Death into the Rewards of eternal Life, it cannot be useful, and if it can, how is the Decree immutable? And if a good Life be in no sense neither the Cause nor the Condition of Man's Salvation, it is altogether useless; and if it be in any sense advantageous to our Salvation, it then destroys this Doctrine of the Decrees; so that whosoever of them is exemplary for his Piety,

he

he owes (I am confident) his Devotion more to his Fears than Faith, as to the other part of their Objection, that those who believe this Doctrine are generally Men of the best lives, I must needs say I look upon it to be false, and did I think it as necessary to expose their Lives as Faith, it would be easie to prove their Lives not much better than their Faith. but

Secondly, They Object *that God may as he is Sovereign Lord of all the world, dispose of Man as well as of all other Creatures, and Things in it, as he pleaseth.*

To this I Answer, that tho' as absolute Lord, God might dispose of us as he pleases; yet since he is Just and Good as well as Omnipotent, and hath by promises obliged himself to Reward us if we do well, we have more reason to hope in his Mercy, and to love him for his Goodness

Goodneſs than whilſt we do well, to dread him for his Omnipotence, or to believe or argue our ſelves out of our Happineſs upon the account of his Power; for tho' as he is Omnipotent he can do what he pleaſes, yet he hath a Will to do only that which is Juſt, ſo that his Power thus ſweetned by his Goodneſs, becomes a ſupport, and not a terror to his People, and therefore cannot tend to the Deſtruction of thoſe Beings which himſelf hath made. God will not unprovok't, deprive any of his Creatures of that Happineſs which he purchaſed for them by the blood of his Son. How is it poſſible for any Man to think that God will deſtroy thoſe Souls which he ſent his Son to to ſave; which will lead me to another Objection, which I take to be the moſt material that ever I heard offered in Vindication of their Decrees, and that is taken from the 9th Chapter of the *Romans*,

and

and the 11th 12th and 13th verse, *for the Children* (saith the Apostle) *being not yet born, neither having done any Good or Evil, that the purpose of God according to Election might stand, not of Works, but of him that calleth, it was said unto her, the elder shall serve the younger, as it is written,* Jacob *have I loved, but* Esau *have I hated.* From these texts the *Calvinists* thus argue, That if before Men were born, and before they had done Good or Evil, God did hate one and love the other; and that upon no other account but that his purpose according to his Election might stand as he affirms, saying, Jacob *have I loved, but* Esau *have I hated,* then say they, *it is plain that God's Election is the Cause of Man's Salvation and not good works.*

To this I Answer, that tho' God's Goodness be the efficient Cause of Man's Salvation; yet his

 living

living *according to God's Will* was the condition of his Election, and that tho' when God was pleased to make his Election concerning them, they had not then done either Good or Evil, yet God by his prescience knowing what they would do, Elects them through the Merits of his Son for what in time they should do, so that God's Decrees are not unconditional, for tho' as to the Cause of our Election, God hath no regard to our Works, yet he hath as to the condition of them, and whereas they Object, *that God loved* Jacob, *but hated* Esau.

To this part of the Objection I Answer, that the Word *Hatred* is not in this Text, to be taken in the strictest Sense, as it signifies only Act of ill will to *Esau*, more than to *Jacob*, but in a milder Sense as it signifies only a less love, and in this Sense the Word *Hate* is taken in the 14th Chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke, and the 26th

Verse

Verſe, where our Saviour ſpeaking of himſelf ſaith, *If any Man come to me and hates not his Father and Mother, Wife and Children, Brethren and Sisters, yea, and his own Life alſo, he cannot be my Diſciple.* Now it is manifeſt that our bleſſed Saviour would never oblige us to love our Enemies, and hate our Parents, for this was to reverſe Nature; God is ſo far from requiring us in this Senſe to hate them, that he hath injoyn'd us to Honour and Obey them, and promiſed us a Reward for our doing it, and alſo threatned to puniſh our diſobedience to them, beſides, it would be unnatural to hate the Authors of our Being, and to wiſh Evil to thoſe, whom Nature as well as Kindneſs had made obliging to us; And therefore to hate can in this place ſignifie no more than a leſs love, in which Senſe it becomes reaſonable, becauſe we are in Duty as well as Gratitude obliged to love every Creature and Thing leſs than

God; for tho' we may have many obligations to our Friends and Parents, yet we have more to engage us to the Love and Service of our God, who is daily doing us good: So that whether we consider his Power over us, or love to us, we ought to love him above all things, and this is all we are obliged too; for to understand the Word *Hate* in the former Sense, would be against the Law of Nature, and make us to become Barbarous and Salvage, that we may be Religious; as if it was our duty to become Bruits in this World, that we may be Saints in the next: And this shall lead me to the next thing proposed, *viz.* To prove that the Doctrine of an absolute immutable and unconditional Decree, would make all Religion useless, and that for these two reasons, *viz.*

First, Because it deprives us of those Powers which are necessary to our living well

Secondly, Because this Doctrine makes all endeavours useless.

1. To what purpose is it for a Man to attempt the doing of that which he had neither Will, Means, nor Power to perform, for let a Man be never so well inclin'd in himself to practice Vertue, and receive never so good Exhortations to the doing it, yet this Absolute and Unconditional Decree would render all his good Thoughts and Resolutions useless, and make the Exhortations of others as vain as his own endeavours, for tho' what God Commands by his *Reveal'd will*, doth not only seem, but also is easie, rational, and advantageous; yet God having made it by his hidden Will impossible to be done, it must needs be idle to attempt it.

For the impossibility of the Act may justly discourage the Agent from the doing that which he believes impossible; and so far should I be from hoping to perswade any

Man to do that which both he and I did think impossible that I should not deem it either prudence or good manners to attempt it, and I do declare, that according to these Men's Principles I do not see how any Man can Answer this common Objection, viz. *That if I am Predestinated to eternal Life I shall be Saved, whatever I do, or however I live; If I am not, all my endeavours will be useless and insignificant.* For that Men's Acts cannot change the Laws of Heaven, and this is so evident in its self, that if I did not design brevity, I could exemplyfie it in every Instance of the Christian Religion; but I shall at present only Instance in the two great Duties of Prayer and Repentance. And

First of Prayer, Should a *Calvinistical* Preacher go to one of his own Congregation who was sick, and desire him to pray, I cannot imagine how he could so much as hope

hope to prevail, I should rather think that his Conscience would fly in his Face for attempting to perswade another to do that which himself did deem impossible, for suppose a *Calvinist* should come to a Sinner on his Death-bed, and exhort him to pray for the pardon of the Sins which he had committed: How easily might he reply, *Alass Sir! what you exhort me to, is not in my power to perform, and I cannot but admire that you exhort me in a dying hour to act contrary to the Faith you have taught me; which makes not only my Prayers, but also your Preaching vain, nay, you your self must change your Faith, or else believe as I do; for you have told me, that I am Predestinated from all Eternity to do all that I shall at any time be able to perform; so that if I am Predestinated to pray, I shall pray whether you exhort me to it or not, and if I am not Predestinated to it, your*

Exhortations will do me no good, because they cannot change an Immutable Decree. For if I am decreed to be Damn'd, than neither you nor I can any more pray me into Heaven than you could pray me out of Hell. If I was now tormented in those Flames, to what purpose is it then to pray? since my Prayers cannot Reverse my doom for if it could the Decree would not be Immutable, and if it cannot, Prayer is not only useless, but also troublesome, and becomes rather an Argument of Folly, than Duty to set about that which a Man hath no Faculties and Powers to perform; so that however reasonable Prayer may be to those who expect advantages from it, yet it cannot be valued by him, who believes it will do him no good. Thus Reader you may see how useless this Impious Doctrine doth render this excellent Duty of Prayer. And so likewise it doth

Secondly

Secondly, The great Duty of Repentance. For let the Preacher press his Arguments with all imaginable Rhetorick, and with all the powerful Motives and Advantages that words can express or thought imagine, yet the belief of these *Calvinistical* Decrees will so discourage his hopes, as that he will not attempt the doing that, which if it was not for these Decrees would appear both irreligious and irrational not to have done.

Repentance is in it self so reasonable, and so really advantageous, that where there is any probability of its being successful for the end it is design'd, it then carries its own Invitations and Rewards with it; yet when a Man meets with one whose Religion teaches him to believe that neither Repentance nor any other Act can do him good, because God by his Decrees had made him only to damn him: When Men have espoused such Doctrines as these,

I do not see how such an one can be brought from an ill Life, without first bringing him from a worse Faith. For if the *Calvinist* represents to him the sadness of his Condition, and from thence draws Motives to perswade him to amend his Life, how easily may he silence this and whatsoever else could be said, by saying, *he was Predestinated to do all that he did, and could not do otherwise.* But

Secondly, Because This Doctrine makes all endeavours useless.

To enjoy the Kingdom of Heaven is so desirable an attainment, that no pains and labours how great soever can be thought too much to purchase it. The excellency of the Prize will highly recompence all our Labours, and no reason can be assign'd why Men should not endeavour to attain it, unless it be this Doctrine of the *Calvinistical* Decrees. For 'tis to no purpose to endeavour to perswade one to attempt an impossibli-

ty, tho' it was most useful and honourable both for his present and future Interest, for could all the Arguments imaginable drawn from the most prevailing Motives, perswade a Man to undertake to make an Engine as intelligent as a Man, or a Child of two days old as learn'd as *Origen*. Now tho' the things themselves are sufficiently inviting to encourage the doing of it, yet the impossibility of it would make it ridiculous to attempt it; And so it is in relation to Religion, and I have no more reason to perswade one to attempt an impossibility in relation to Religion, than in relation to any other thing, it being impractical and rude to offer to perswade any Man to do that which he believes impossible. I could not think it possible to change his Life, until I had first shewn him the Impiety of his Faith, for I should think all my Labours would be to no purpose till I had done this, for should I ask a bold daring Sinner

why

Why he did blaspheme God, who could as easily speak him into nothing as he had at first created him out of it, should I represent to him his Ingratitude, in thus requiting his best Friend, and choicest Benefactor, and ask him, what made him so insensible of the Mercies and Favours of the Almighty? As thus by a wicked Life and impenitent Heart to Sin away his Happiness, if I ask him why he is so fond of momentary Pleasures, as for the injoyment of them to venture upon eternal Pains? If I ask him, why he doth not repent of his evil Life that he may dye a happy Death.

To all this he may truly say; *Alas Sir! what I have done I was predestinated too, and you know we poor Mortals cannot find the Decrees of Heaven, but are obliged both to do and suffer what God pleaseth to Decree us to, in that whatever difference God may as to our final Interest, make*

Between us, yet you as well as I have done only what you was necessitated to. I have as great a desire to live according to God's reveal'd Will as you; but woe is me I cannot, so that whatever I have done contrary to my Reputation in this world, or to my Interest in the next, is not to be imputed to any fault of my will or Life, and I cannot but admire that you believing as I do, should exhort me to Prayer and Repentance, when you know I cannot do what you desire. And this shall lead me to the last thing proposed, viz. To give such an account of the Divine Decrees as may enable others to avoid those impious Principles which the Thief had imbibed.

How destructive it is to true Piety, to allow Men that they do the Will of God, when they live Impiously hath been already shewn; as also how unreasonable it is to punish Men for the Commission of those

Sins which they cannot avoid, that therefore I may not oppose the *Calvinistical* Opinion concerning the Divine Decrees, without offering at least what I think more for the glory of God and good of Man, which that I may do, I shall give a short account of what I take to be the Sentiments of Divines concerning God's Method of saving Sinners, *viz.*

That God sent his Son into the World to save it, and that our blessed Saviour did by his Death and Sufferings prevail with his Father to pardon our disobedience in our first Parents, and to give us eternal Life through his Merits, and this eternal Life which he purchased for us, was of such a nature that we could not forfeit it but through our own fault: So that tho' we do not believe with the *Pelagians*, that we could *in puris naturalibus* go to Heaven, yet we do not with the *Calvinists* think that we are by any Decree excluded thence, but are perswaded that if we

be not wanting to our selves, that we may as we are commanded, work out our Salvation with fear and trembling. For so good a God we serve, that he hath not only redeemed us with the Blood of his Son, but also given us Grace to receive the benefit of it, insomuch, that if we now perish, after our blessed Saviour hath done and suffered so much to purchase Salvation for us, we are not to impute our Destruction to our want of sufficient Grace to enable us to do what we are required; but to our own neglect of those means of Grace which God hath given us, for tho' we are through the Merits of Christ, put into a State of Salvation, yet we are not so certainly secured in it, but that we may loose it unless we make it our care and endeavour to attain it, for tho' we are put in a capacity of enjoying Heaven, and tho' our blessed Saviour dyed to bring us there, yet if we do not endeavour to attain this

Happiness, we may miss it, and receive the Sentence of Condemnation, because we have neglected so great Salvation. God hath been so far from excluding any Man from the Kingdom of Heaven by any absolute Decree, that he hath made our way thither, not only possible, but also easie; and if it doth not appear to be our Interest and Happiness, as well as Duty to live religiously, 'tis because we are drawn away by our own Lusts and enticed, because present ensnaring Objects make us forgetful of our everlasting Happiness; which being not seen by the Eye of Men, they suffer their Sense to be too hard for their Faith, and are thereby carried away by the love of this World, to the neglect of their Interest in the next. But that Men do this is not imputed to their want of Grace sufficient to do what they are commanded, but to their great neglect of their true Interest; and this hath been sufficiently proved by both

Fathers

Fathers and Councils: Some of whose Testimonies I would produce, but that I know the Men whose Opinions I oppose, are to proud to value any Authority but their own, and therefore I shall only offer some Texts of Scripture to prove that God hath given sufficient Grace to all Men, whereby they may work out their Salvation and gain Heaven, and therefore are not excluded either from Holyness or Happiness by any Absolute Immutable or Uncontroul-able Decree, and the first Text that I shall make use of is taken from the 7th Chapter of *the Acts of the Apostles*, and the 51th verse, where the Apostle doth call those who resisted the holy Ghost, *Stiff-necked and uncircumcised*, telling them *that they as well as their Fore-Fathers did always resist the holy Ghost*. Now if these persons to whom St. *Paul* writ, had not had sufficient Grace given them to receive his Inspirations, why doth St. *Paul* blame them for

for their not doing that, that was not in their power to do; and therefore ought not to be imputed to them as a fault.

Had this Doctrine of the *Calvinists* been either believed or taught in the Apostles time, when St. *Barnabas* and St. *Paul* did exhort their Followers to continue in the Grace of God. How eafily might they have Answered, *Alas! Gentlemen, it is not in our power to do what you exhort us to, God hath not given us Grace sufficient to do what he commanded, for God hath from all eternity Predestinated us to live as we do, and we may sooner shake the Foundations of the Earth, than change the Decrees of Heaven*: Which Reply may evidence that this Doctrine of sufficient Grace being given by God to all Men, is no new *Hypothesis* of mine invented to destroy the *Calvinistical* Notion of an Absolute, Immutable, and Unconditional Decree, but is indeed the

the Doctrine of the Scriptures, as is evident from these following Texts, *viz.* the 12th Chapter *of the 2d Epistle of St. Paul* to the *Corinthians*, and the 7th verse, where we read *that St. Paul* (*upon his having a Thorn in the Flesh that he might not be exalted above measure through the abundance of the Revelations*) prays in the 8th verse, *That the Thorn might depart from him.* In Answer to which prayer, God tells him in the 9th verse, *that his Grace was sufficient for him.* To this so plain and positive a Text it may even seem superfluous to offer any farther proof, yet that I may leave this great Truth the more undoubted, I shall offer two Texts more, which in my judgment do evidently prove this Doctrine of sufficient Grace. And the next that I shall offer is taken out of the 23th Chapter *of the Gospel of St. Mathew* and the 37th verse, where our blessed Saviour doth with much

compassion

compassion bewail the obstinacy of *Jerusalem*, saying, *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou who killest the Prophets, and stonest them who are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy Children together, as a Hen gathereth her Chickens together and ye would not.* By which words our Saviour doth declare his willingness to save those who did desire his Salvation. It would be almost endless to Cite all the kind Invitations which are given to encourage our living Religiously, and to prove our having sufficient Grace to do it, without which all encouragements would seem but as so many delusions and abuses of the Divine Veracity, and therefore I shall add but one Text more (least I should rather seem to cloy the *Reader*, than to prove a Truth in its self evident to all, but those, whose Lust and Pride are so hard for their Reason and their Conscience) and that is taken from the *first Ep. of St. Paul to Timothy*, the

the 2d Chapter and the 4th verse, in which St. *Paul* tells us in words as plain as words can be spoken in, *That God will have all Men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the Truth.* So far is our blessed Saviour from desiring our Death and Destruction, that he *Wills* all Men to be saved; what reason have we then to espouse such Doctrines? which can serve no end of Piety, but tends rather to overthrow it.

Reader, tho' the Doctrines I have here endeavoured to expose do carry in themselves their own Condemnation, and tho' such is their Impiety, that they need but be named in order to their being abominated, yet so far do some Men's Names even consecrate the vilest Principles as to make them pass for the best Doctrines; otherwise those Men would never have been thought the greatest propagators of the Gospel, whose Religion was a Shame to it.

This Doctrine of an Absolute, Immutable and Unconditional Decree, hath in my judgment made more *Infidels* and *Deists* than any Philosophical Principles whatsoever, which make

me think our *Atheists* have taken their disbelief of a God, from the ill Character given of him by the *Calvinists*, they thinking the Notion of an Omnipotent Power without an equal goodness to be the Description of a Fiend, rather than a God, thought it more reasonable to reject the belief of a Being above themselves, rather then to acknowledg such an one whose Honour and Glory they were taught consisted in his making Man only to destroy him, this may make them deny his Being, who was so willing to shew his Power in destroying theirs. It being natural to a Man, not only to wish, but also endeavour to rid himself of those Persons and Things which he finds hurtful to him, and it being easie to believe what one doth desire, such Men as our *Atheists* generally are, may let any shew of an Argument make them conclude against the Notion of any Being which may hinder the injoyment of their so much beloved Wine and Women.

If different Opinions concerning God and Religion, have made many [illegible]

that the *Calvinistical* Opinions should make Men turn *Deists*. For that it is much more reasonable to believe no *Revealed Religion* at all, than such an One, which makes God destroy the *Works of his Hands*, and makes his own *Laws* and *Injunctions* useless; for I cannot understand to what purpose 'tis to prescribe us Laws to walk by, or to appoint Men to teach these Laws, or to be angry with the Devil for perswading us to break them, since according to these Mens Principles, God's own Decrees have made the Teachings of the one and the Temptations of the other useless.

Thus *Reader*, you may see how *Calvinism* doth occasion both *Atheism* and *Deism*, thoughts of which hath occasion'd these Reflections on the *Fair Predestinarian*, and not any disrespect to the Teachers of it; for I hope all Men of any Charity will believe that one Man may innocently reflect upon the extravagant Opinions of another, without any hatred against his Person.

What account can be given of these Decrees I know not, but am sure that all

FINIS.